

# ALICE of OLD VINCENNES

By MAURICE THOMPSON

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(Continued.)

## CHAPTER XIII.

### A MEETING IN THE WILDERNESS.

BEVERLEY set out on his mid-winter journey to Kaskaskia with a tempest in his heart, and it was perhaps the storm's energy that gave him the courage to face undaunted and undoubting what his experience must have told him lay in his path. What meant suffering to him if he could but rescue Alice? And what were life should he fail to rescue her? The old, old song hummed in his heart, every phrase of it distinct above the tumult of the storm. Could cold and hunger, swollen streams, ravenous

wild beasts and scalp hunting savages baffle him? No; there is no barrier that can hinder love. He said this over and over to himself after his rencounter with the four Indian scouts on the Wabash. He repeated it with every heart beat until he fell in with some friendly red men, who took him to their camp, where, to his great surprise, he met M. Roussillon. It was his song when again he strode off toward the west on his lonely way.

He did not know that Long Hair and his band were fast on his track, but the knowledge could not have urged him to greater haste. He strained every muscle to its utmost, kept every nerve to the highest tension. Yonder toward the west was help for Alice. That was all he cared for.

But if Long Hair was pursuing him with relentless greed for the reward offered by Hamilton there were friendly footsteps still nearer behind him, and one day at high noon while he was bending over a little fire broiling some liberal cuts of venison a finger tapped him on the shoulder. He sprang up and grappled Uncle Jason. At the same time, standing near by, he saw Simon Kenton, his old time Kentucky friend. The pungent features of one and the fine, rugged face of the other swam in a mist before Beverley's eyes. Kenton was laughing quietly, his strong, upright form shaking to the force of his pleasure. He was in the early prime of a vigorous life, not handsome, but strikingly attractive by reason of a certain glow in his face and a kindly flash in his deep-set eyes.

"Well, my boy," he exclaimed, laying his left hand on Beverley's shoulder, while in the other he held a long, heavy rifle. "I'm glad to see ye, glad to see ye!"

"Thought we was Injuns, eh?" said Uncle Jason. "An' if we had 'n' been wed 'n' been shore o' your scalp!" The whiskered old crocodile chuckled gleefully.

"And where are ye goin'?" demanded Kenton. "Ye're makin' what lacks a heap o' bel'n' a bee line for some place or other."

Beverley was dazed and vacant minded. Things seemed wavering and dim. He pushed the two men from him and gazed at them without speaking. Their presence and voices did not convince him.

"Ye meat's a-burnin'," said Uncle Jason, stooping to turn it on the smoldering coals. "Ye must be hungry. Cookin' enough for a regiment."

Kenton shook Beverley with rough familiarity as if to rouse his faculties. "What's the matter? Fitz, my lad, don't ye know Si Kenton? It's not so long since we were like brothers, and now ye don't speak to me. Ye've not forgotten me, Fitz?"

"Mebby he don't like ye as well as ye thought he did," drawled Uncle Jason. "I hev known o' fellers a-beln' mistaken jes' that way."

Beverley got his wits together as best he could, taking in the situation by such degrees as seemed at the time unduly slow, but which were really mere momentary falterings.

"Why, Kenton! Jason!" he presently exclaimed, a cordial gladness blinding with his surprise. "How did ye get here? Where did ye come from?"

He looked from one to the other back and forth, with a wondering smile breaking over his bronzed and determined face.

"We've been hot on yer trail for thirty hours," said Kenton. "Roussillon put us on it back yonder. But what are ye up to? Where are ye goin'?"

"I'm going to Clark at Kaskaskia to bring him yonder." He waved his hand eastward. "I am going to take Vincennes and kill Hamilton."

"Well, ye're takin' a mighty queer course, my boy, if ye ever expect to find Kaskaskia. Ye're already twenty miles too far south."

"Carryin' his gun on the same shoulder all the time," said Uncle Jason, "has made 'im kind o' swing in a curve like. 'Tain't good luck now to carry yer gun on yer left shoulder. When ye do it meks ye take a longer step with yer right foot than ye do with yer left, an' ye can't walk a straight line to save yer liver. Ventrebien! La venaison brule encore! Look at that dasted meat burnin' ag'in!"

He jumped back to the fire to turn the scorching cuts.

Beverley wrung Kenton's hand and looked into his eyes as a man does when an old friend comes suddenly out of the past, so to say, and brings the freshness and comfort of a strong, true soul to brace him in his hour of great need.

son were enthusiastic. They wanted nothing better than an opportunity to aid in rescuing any girl who had shown so much patriotism and pluck. But Uncle Jason was fond of Alice, and Beverley's story affected him peculiarly on her account.

"They's one question I'm a-goin' to put to ye, young man," he said after he had heard everything and they had talked it all over, "an' I want ye to answer it straight as a bullet 'om yer gun."

"Of course, Jason. Go ahead," said Beverley. "I shall be glad to answer." But his mind was far away with the gold haired maiden in Hamilton's prison. He scarcely knew what he was saying.

"Air ye expectin' to marry Alice Roussillon?"

Beverley started as if a blow had been aimed at him. Uncle Jason's question indeed was a blow as unexpected as it was direct and powerful.

"I know it's a poor p'nted," the old man added after a short pause, "an' ye may think that I ain't got no business askin' it, but I have. That little gal's a pet o' mine, an' I'm a-lookin' after her an' expectin' to see that she's not bothered by nobody who's not goin' to do right by her. Marryin' is a mighty good thing, but—"

Kenton had been peeping under the low hanging scrub oak boughs while Uncle Jason was speaking these last words, and now he suddenly interrupted:

"The deuce! Look yonder!" he growled out in startling tone. "Injuns!"

It was a sharp snap of the conversation's thread, and at the same time the three friends realized that they had been careless in not keeping a better lookout. They let fall the meat they had not yet finished eating and seized their guns.

Five or six dark forms were moving toward them across a little point of the prairie that cut into the wood a quarter of a mile distant.

"Yander's more of 'em," said Uncle Jason, as if not in the least concerned, wagging his head in an opposite direction, from which another squad was approaching.

That he duly appreciated the situation appeared only in the celerity with which he acted.

Kenton at once assumed command, and his companions felt his perfect fitness. There was no doubt from the first as to what the Indians meant, but even if there had been it would have soon vanished, for in less than three minutes twenty-one savages were swiftly and silently forming a circle enclosing the spot where the three white men, who had covered themselves as best they could with trees, waited in grim steadiness for the worst.

Quite beyond gunshot range, but near enough for Uncle Jason to recognize Long Hair as their leader, the Indians halted and began making signs to one another all round the line. Evidently they dreaded to test the marksmanship of such riders as they knew most border men to be. Indeed Long Hair had personal knowledge of what might certainly be expected from both Kenton and Uncle Jason. They were terrible when out for fight. The red warriors from Georgia to the great lakes had heard of them; their names smacked of tragedy. Nor was Beverley without fame among Long Hair's followers, who had listened to the story of his fighting qualities brought to Vincennes by the two survivors of the scouting party so cleverly defeated by him.

"The liver colored cowards," said Kenton, "are afeared of us in a shoot-in' match. They know that a lot of 'em would have to die if they should undertake an open fight with us. It's some sort of a sneakin' game they are studyin' about just now."

"I'm a-gittin' mos' too ole to shoot w' a cent," said Uncle Jason, "but I'd give half o' my scalp of that Long Hair would come close enough to me to get a bead on his left eye. It's t'f'ble plain that we're gone gossin' this time, I'm thinkin'. Still it'd be mighty satisfyin' if I could plug out a left eye or two 'fore I go."

Beverley was silent. The words of his companions were heard by him, but not noticed. Nothing interested him save the thought of escaping and making his way to Clark. To fall meant infinitely more than death, of which he had as small fear as most brave men, and to succeed meant everything that life could offer. So in the unlimited selfishness of love he did not take his companions into account.

The three stood in a close set clump of four or five scrub oaks at the highest point of a thinly wooded knoll that sloped down in all directions to the prairie. Their view was wide, but in places obstructed by the trees.

"Men," said Kenton after a thoughtful and watchful silence, "the thing looks kind o' squally for us. I don't see much of a chance to get out of this alive, but we've got to try."

He showed by the density of his voice and a certain gray film in his face that he felt the awful gravity of the situation, but he was calm, and not a muscle quivered.

"They's jes' two chances for us," said Uncle Jason, "an' them's as slim as a brown straw. We've got to stan' here an' fight it out or wait till night an' sneak through atween 'em an' run for it."

"I don't see any hope o' sneakin' through the line," observed Kenton. "It's not goin' to be dark tonight."

"Wa-a-l," Uncle Jason drawled nonchalantly while he took in a quid of tobacco, "I've been into tighter squeezes 'an this many a time, an' I got out too."

"Likely enough," said Kenton, still reflecting while his eyes roamed around the circle of savages.

"I fit the stunks in Ferginny 'fore ye's thought of Si Kenton, an' down in Car'lina in them hills. If ye think

I'm a-goin' to be scissed where they ain't no scarp 'bout tryin' a few dodges, yer a dad dastard fool 'an I used to think ye was an' thet's makin' a big compliment to ye."

"Well, we don't have to argy this question, Uncle Jason. They're a-gittin'—"



A young warrior leaped high and fell paralyzed.

tin' ready to run in upon us, and we've got to fight. I say, Beverley, are ye ready for fast shootin'? Have ye got a-plenty o' bullets?"

"Yes; Roussillon gave me a hundred. Do you think?"

He was interrupted by a yell that leaped from savage mouth to mouth all round the circle, and then the charge began.

"Steady, now!" growled Kenton. "Let's not be in a hurry. Wait till they come high enough to hit 'em before we shoot."

The time was short, for the Indians came on at almost race horse speed. Uncle Jason fired first, the long, keen crack of his small bore rifle splitting the air with a suggestion of vicious energy, and a little young warrior who was outstripping all his fellows leaped high and fell paralyzed.

"Can't shoot w' a cent," mut-

tered the old man, defiantly beginning to reload his gun the while, "but I jes' happened to hit that buck. He'll never get my scalp, thet's sartin' and sure."

Beverley and Kenton each likewise dropped an Indian, but the shots did not even check the rush. Long Hair had planned to capture his prey, not kill it. Every savage had his orders to take the white men alive. Hamilton's larger reward depended on this.

Right on they came, as fast as their nimble legs could carry them, yelling like demons, and they reached the grove before the three white men could reload their guns. Then every warrior took cover behind a tree and began scrambling forward from bole to bole, thus approaching rapidly without much exposure.

A struggle ensued which for desperate energy has probably never been surpassed. Like three lions at bay, the white men met the shock, and lion-like they fought in the midst of seven-teen stalwart and determined savages.

"Don't kill them. Take them alive. Throw them down and hold them," was Long Hair's order, loudly shouted in the tongue of his tribe.

Both Kenton and Jason understood every word and knew the significance of such a command from the leader. It naturally came into Kenton's mind that Hamilton had been informed of his visit to Vincennes and had offered a reward for his capture. This being true, death as a spy would be the certain result if he were taken back. He might as well die now. As for Beverley, he thought only of Alice yonder as he had left her a prisoner in Hamilton's hands. Uncle Jason, if he thought at all, probably considered nothing but present escape, though he prayed audibly to the Blessed Virgin even while he lay helpless upon the ground pinned down by the weight of an enormous Indian. He could not move any part of himself save his lips, and these mechanically put forth the wheezing supplication.

Beverley and Kenton, being young and powerful, were not so easily mastered. For awhile indeed they appeared to be more than holding their own. They time and time again scattered the entire crowd by the violence of their muscular efforts, and after it had finally closed in upon them in a solid body they swayed and swung it back and forth and round and round until the writhing, savage mass looked as if caught in the vortex of a whirlwind, but each tremendous exertion could not last long. Eight to one made too great a difference between the contending parties, and the only possible conclusion of the struggle soon came. Seized upon by desperate, clinging, wolflike assailants, the white men felt their arms, legs and bodies weighted down and their strength fast going.

Kenton fell next after Uncle Jason and was soon tightly bound with rawhide thongs. He lay on his back panting and utterly exhausted, while Beverley still kept up the unequal fight.

Long Hair sprang in at the last moment to make doubly certain the securing of his most important captive. He flung his long and powerful arms around Beverley from behind and made a great effort to throw him upon the ground. The young man, feeling this fresh and vigorous clasp, turned himself about to put forth one more mighty spurt of power. He lifted the stalwart Indian bodily and dashed him headlong against the buttressed root of a tree half a rod distant, breaking the smaller bone of his left forearm and well nigh knocking him senseless.

It was a fine exhibition of manly

strength, but there could be nothing gained by it. A blow on the back of his head the next instant stretched Beverley face downward and unconscious on the ground. The savages turned him over and looked satisfied when they found that he was not dead. They bound him with even greater care than they had shown in securing the others, while Long Hair stood by stolidly looking on, meantime supporting his broken forearm in his hand.

"Ugh, dog!" he grunted and gave Beverley a kick in the side. Then turning a furtive stare upon Uncle Jason, he proceeded to deliver against his old, dry ribs three or four like contributions with resounding effect, "Polcott! Little old greasy woman!" he snarled. "Make good fire for warrior to dance by!" Kenton also received his full share of the kicks and verbal abuse, after which Long Hair gave orders for fires to be built. Then he looked to his hurt arm and had the bone set and bandaged, never so much as wincing the while.

It was soon apparent that the Indians purposed to celebrate their successful enterprise with a feast. They cooked a large amount of buffalo steak. Then, each with his hands full of the savory meat, they began to dance around the fires, drowning meantime an atrociously repellent chant.

Before this was ended a rain began to fall, and it rapidly thickened from a desultory shower to a roaring down-pour that effectively quenched not only the fires around which the savages were dancing, but the enthusiasm of the dancers as well. During the rest of the afternoon and all night long the fall was incessant, accompanied by a cold, panting, wailing southwest wind.

Beverley lay on the ground face upward, the rawhide strings torturing his limbs, the chill of cold water searling his bones. He could see nothing but the dim, strange canopy of flying rain, against which the bare boughs of the scrub oaks were vaguely outlined; he could hear nothing but the cry of the wind and the wash of the water when fell upon him and ran under him, bubbling and gurgling as if fiendishly exultant.

The night dragged on through its terrible length, dealing out its indescribable horrors, and at last morning arrived, with a stinging and uncertain gift of light slowly increasing until the dripping trees appeared forlornly gray and brown against clouds now break-

ing into masses that gave but little rain.

There was great stir among the Indians. Long Hair stalked about scrutinizing the ground. Beverley saw him come near time and again with a furtive, inquiring scowl on his face. Grunts and is-onic exclamations passed from mouth to mouth, and presently the import of it all could not be mistaken. Kenton and Jason were gone—had escaped during the night—and the rain had completely obliterated their tracks.

The Indians were furious. Long Hair sent out picked parties of his best scouts with orders to scour the country in all directions, keeping with them a few of the older warriors. Beverley was fed while he waited out a venison, and Long Hair made him sit

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were attuned to the proper pitch. "Imagine where we would have been if we had not been saved. What service, then, do we not owe the church?"

"Many of us, I fear, are like the rich, young ruler who could not follow the true path, because he thought too much of his earthly possessions. I don't think people are to be particularly commended for giving their service and possessions to Christ, for are not we and all our possessions his?"

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